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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 000317

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [AJ](#) [AM](#) [PREL](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: BREAKTHROUGHS BETWEEN TURKEY AND ARMENIA APPEAR UNLIKELY

REF: 2003 ANKARA 6398

(U) Classified by DCM Robert Deutsch, E. O. 12958, reasons 1.5 (b) and (d),

1. (C) Summary: In a January 14 meeting, Turkish MFA Caucasus Department Head Murat Adali reaffirmed that Turkey linked opening the Armenian border and full diplomatic relations to Armenian concessions in Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) (reftel). Although MFA officials will travel to Yerevan in February, they are not taking any significant new proposals with them, nor do any appear imminent. Adali was downbeat on the prospect of opening the border to Turkish and Armenian diplomats, citing what he claims are "practical" problems. End Summary.

Policy Changes Still Linked to Nagorno-Karabakh

2. (C) Adali began by declaring that Armenia "must take the first step" in order for the border to be opened and relations to be normalized. According to Adali, for any breakthrough, Armenia will first have to make concessions on NK and occupied territories, and explicitly recognize the Turkish-Armenian border. However, in the course of almost two hours of discussion, Adali discussed NK and the territories in detail and did not mention the border again, as if he considers the border issue a throwaway.

3. (C) Adali noted that Armenian President Kocharian has refused to withdraw from occupied territories, in part because Kocharian said Armenia will need 5000 additional troops to guard the new border. However, Adali thinks time is on Turkey's side for concessions on NK and the territories. He claims that Russians are withdrawing support for Kocharian, and that the closed border is hurting Armenia economically.

4. (C) Adali characterized the linkage as a matter of "ethics." Asked what ethical principle he was talking about, he replied "we (Turkey and Azerbaijan) speak the same language." He is bitter about what he perceives as the U.S. and Western Europe favoring Armenia in the dispute with Azerbaijan, at one point saying that the "international community" really means "the Christian community."

MFA Officials Travel to Yerevan in February

5. (C) Adali said he and DDG Tezgor are going to Yerevan for talks in early or mid February. They are carrying a proposal for Armenian withdrawals from five occupied rayons to which Azeri President Ilham Aliyev "gave the green light" during FM Gul's January 9-10 visit to Azerbaijan. (Adali thinks of this as a "new" idea.)

6. (C) Adali said the Turkish/Armenian "roadmap" for better relations was 80% complete, with exception of "regional aspects" (i.e., NK -- the main item). He added, without elaborating, that Turkey and Armenia will unveil some economic confidence building measures in the near future.

"Practical Problems" in Opening Border to Diplomats

7. (C) Asked whether Turkey will open the border to Turkish and Armenian diplomatic passport holders soon, Adali asked rhetorically, "what is soon?" Adali said such a measure is "not a political problem" but is a "practical" problem. He said that setting up and staffing a border crossing that will only be used infrequently would be a waste of resources, especially in winter. Adali also questioned the practical necessity of the measure when Turkish and Armenian diplomats can fly from Yerevan to Istanbul on existing charter flights.

Genocide Resolution "Is Your Problem"

18. (C) Adali asserted the possibility of a genocide resolution in the U.S. Congress "is your problem." He asserted without elaborating that such a resolution will have no effect on Turkey and predicted it would have only short-term effects on U.S.-Turkey relations (Caucasus DDG Tezgor made the same assertion in October).

Turkey-Armenia Trade

19. (C) Adali estimated current Turkey/Armenia trade at \$100 million annually, which he said makes Turkey Armenia's second largest trading partner. Much of the trade consists of durable consumer goods exported from Turkey to Armenia. Adali characterized the trade as more important for Armenia than Turkey, estimating that trade would "only" reach \$200 million even if the border is opened.

110. (C) Comment: Adali's narrow vision, while not characteristic of all MFA officials, is an example of what Turkey must overcome in order to improve relations with Armenia. While his minimizing the impact of an Armenian genocide resolution is not credible, it reflects a hidebound bureaucratic mentality that is all too common, as does his failure to grasp the importance of opening the border to diplomats. End Comment.
EDELMAN